

Remind
A
S E R M O N

Preached before the

Q U E E N,

A T

W H I T E - H A L L.

Upon *Friday* the 26th of *Febr.* 1692.

By *W. Talbot*, D. D. and Dean of *Worcester*.

Published by Her Majesty's Command.

L O N D O N,

Printed for *Thomas Bennet*, at the *Half-Moon* in
St. Paul's Church-Yard. MDCXCII.

A
SERMON

Preached before the

QUEEN.

AT
WHITE-HALL.

Upon Friday the 28th of Sept. 1691.

By W. Haller, D. D. and Dean of Worcester.

Printed by J. Streater, in the Strand.

LONDON.

Printed for Thomas Bowne, at the Half-Moon in
St Pauls Church-Yard, MDCXCII.

Commentary upon this Prophecy, that the name of
this book is derived from a word that signifies law-
HABAKKUK Chap. I. Ver. xiii.
The art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and
canst not look on iniquity; wherefore, lookest thou
upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest
thy tongue when the wicked devoureth, the man that
is more righteous than he.

A Subject, which will almost necessarily
lead our thoughts and meditations to
a future judgment and State, kill our
affections and desires to the empty fading
vanities of this World, and raise them to the more
substantial and durable satisfactions of that which
is to come; Teach us a quiet submission to the will
of God's Counsels, and engage us to a sincere obe-
dience to that of his Commands.

A Subject, which as it must be necessary at all times,
so cannot be unreasonable at this; these being the
great ends which that abstinence, those pious Au-
sterities which our holy Mother in conformity to
pure and uncorrupted Antiquity enjoins us at this
season, are designed for, and subservient to; and
these will be the proper improvements of my in-
tended Discourse upon the Argument now be-
fore us.

It is *St. Hieron's* observation in his Preface to his Commentary upon this Prophecy, that the name of *Habakkuk* is derived from a word that signifies *Embracing*, and one Notion that he understands it in, is the Embraces of a Wrestler, who clasps his Arms about the person he contends with: and in this sence our Prophet has very emphatically deserved his name, for in this Chapter we have him contending with no less an Antagonist than the great God, the Lord of Hosts, and upon no lower a Subject than his Holiness, Justice, and Goodness; expostulating with him about the flourishing estate and prosperity of bad Men, and the miseries and afflictions of the Good, as if his permitting thereof were inconsistent with those his Glorious Attributes; for to that effect he addresses himself to him in the words I have now read.

But is it not a very bold and daring thing for a Creature thus to arraign the Justice of his Creator; for the thing formed to dispute with him that formed it, why is such or such a thing so or so?

The forementioned *Father* labours to bring the Prophet off, by laying, that he does not here speak his own sence, as if he thought hardly of God for those his Dispensations, but in his own person represents the frailty and impatience of Man.

Thus much indeed must be allowed, that it is not unusual for holy men in Scripture to speak of others

in the First Person, especially when they blame, or reflect upon any fault in them. So St. Paul when he had spoken some things in his own Person in the 4th of the 1st. to the *Corinthians* expressly tells them, that he had in a figure transferr'd those things unto himself for their sakes. And in the 3d. to the *Romans* 7th. says he; If the truth of God hath more abounded through my lye to his glory, why am I judged? which certainly St. Paul never meant of himself, but only personates an impious Objector.

But yet, that there is any necessity for us with St. Hieron to excuse the Prophet in this place, as not objecting of himself, but only urging what Wicked or Atheistical persons might object against such a seemingly unjust dispensation, is more than I can see. This I am very sure of, that the best of God's servants pretend not to Perfection, or to be without their Failings, and in this particular case before us, we have several instances in Scripture; as we shall see by and by, of men of no less character than *Habakkuk*, who have made the same objection with this in the Text. But whether he objects in his own, or in the person of another, I will not contend; be that as it will, the case was this: He had in the beginning of the Chapter complained of the iniquity of the Jews, for which God threatens from the 12th vers. to bring upon them the *Chaldeans*, that bitter and hasty Nation, as he calls them, and that they

shall march through the breadth of their land, and possess their dwellings; and lead them away captive. And then after he had in the 12th. ver. deprecated this severe Judgment, and begg'd of God not to suffer those whom he had from the beginning chosen to be his peculiar people, to come to an utter excision; He acknowledges that *Nebuchadonofor* was raised up by God for a scourge to the wicked, strengthened and supported by him for the correction of his Enemies: But yet expostulates with him for suffering him to ruin, and to grow fat with the spoils of those that were not so bad as himself. As if he had said, True it is, O Lord, we are a very wicked and sinful people; but yet not so bad as the Tyrannous *Nebuchadonofor*, and his Idolatrous *Chaldeans*. How then can it be consistent with thy justice and hatred to sin, to permit the greater sinners to prosper in their oppressions of the less, of those that are better than themselves?

Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity; wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?

Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, this is one of those many condescensions to our infirmities, which the holy Spirit is pleased to make in
Scripture

Scripture, when he speaks of God, and means no more, than that sin is the most odious and detestable thing to God that can be, as offensive to him as those things are to us, which we cannot bear the sight of.

And canst not look on iniquity, (i.e.) thou canst not abett or approve of it, for so the phrases to behold, to know, to look on, do frequently signify in the Scriptures. The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, says David, (i.e.) he is pleased with, he does approve of it. And the Lords eyes will behold, or look on the thing that is just (i.e.) with Approbation or Complacency.

Wherefore then looke'st thou upon them that deal treacherously? (i.e.) Why dost thou favour them with success in their treacherous enterprises?

And holdest thy tongue, dost not interpose, dost not hinder the wicked from Devouring, Oppressing, Enslaving, Persecuting, Murdering the man that is more righteous than he, who comparatively with respect to the Oppressor may be said to be righteous, or at least less wicked than he.

The words thus explained, contain an expostulation with God, concerning that seemingly strange dispensation of his Providence in suffering the wicked to prosper and thrive, and that by the afflictions and oppressions of the Righteous, as if it were a reproach to his Holiness and Justice.

Which

Which since it is the main engine, by which the *Atheist* endeavours to batter down the great Doctrine of Providence, and consequently to render all Religion useless; (For if God does not concern himself with Affairs below, if he has no knowledge of what we do, to what purpose should we worship or serve him? Then is our Preaching vain, and your Faith and Works vain also; then they are not Fools who count our lives madness, that wear them out in the strict exercises of Watching, and Fasting, Mortification and Self-denial, but we really are the Fools and Mad men that take so much pains, undergoe such severities, renounce the satisfactions of the world, deny our appetites, crucifie our flesh, macerate our Bodies, dye daily, (and all for the sake and service of a Being that knows nothing of all this, from whom therefore we can neither expect reward for performing these services, nor fear to be punished for leaving them undone.) I humbly crave leave to consider it very particularly, and to examine the whole force of it in this method.

I. I shall consider the ground or occasion of this expostulation in the Text, and of the *Atheists* Objections against Providence, (*viz.*) Bad men's flourishing and thriving, and that by their injuring and oppressing of Good men, *their devouring those that are more righteous than they.*

II. I shall inquire into the Objections that are made against God's permission hercof, and the Atheistical Conclusions that are drawn from it.

III. I shall attempt a vindication of the Divine Providence, by shewing the weakness of those Objections, and the unreasonableness of those Conclusions.

Lastly, I shall by way of Application shew what more reasonable Inferences we ought to make from this Dispensation, what practical instructions it will afford us for the government of our Lives.

I. For the ground or occasion of this expostulation in the Text, and of the Atheists objections against Providence, (*viz.*) Bad mens flourishing and thriving, and that by their injuring and oppressing of good men, *their devouring those that are more righteous than they.* And here I intend not to dispute the truth of the Supposition, but shall very readily allow it, and must profess my self so far from being surpris'd or wondring at it, that I should think it very strange if it should be otherwise; for good men cannot oppress, or take indirect methods to thrive, they have a God above and a Conscience within, which overawes them, and will not suffer them to do it; nor can they be supposed to use such means as may effectually secure them from the violences and oppressions of others; for the good man charitably measuring others by himself, and thinking that they would as little harm him, as he would them, or as he had deserved from them, does not stand upon a constant guard, nor use preventive methods to keep off those injuries that he is not apprehensive of;

nor does he when he sees them coming use any force or violence to repel them which may hurt the aggressor, but chooses rather to suffer injury than to do it. But now as he lies thus open and defenceless, on the other hand a bad man has none of those restraints of God, or Conscience, or Charity to hinder him from falling upon the Prey that lies exposed to him : Tell him of a God that will execute Vengeance upon the Oppressor, and he cries out with him in the *Psal.* *Tush, thou God carest not for it.* If Conscience stir or offer to interpose, he rebukes it in the words of the Devils to our Saviour, *Art thou come to torment me before the time ?* And for Charity or doing by others as he would be done by, 'tis a thing that he has no notion of, he is for doing by others, not as he wishes or desires, but as he believes others would do by him. And being very wicked himself, he judges all others to be like himself, and therefore whatever injustice or villany he intends or is guilty of towards his Neighbour, 'tis no more he apprehends than what, were his and his Neighbour's circumstances changed, his Neighbour would do to him. And whether he believe so or not, his will hath no bounds but his power.

So that considering the natural bent and inclinations of bad men, that they are the *οὐ βουλόμενοι πλεῖν* in the *Apostle's* phrase, *those that will be rich*, resolved upon thriving and gaining in this world as their great end, and chief good : and with all that they have none of those restraints, that good men are under, to check their inclinations, or to hinder them from prosecuting them; and adding to this that the defenceless estate of the

Humble

Humble, Meek, Patient, Charitable man does invite and encourage them to fix upon him as their Prey, it is not to be wondred at, that *those that deal treacherously prosper, or that the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he.* And yet this is the ground of this expostulation with God in the Text, why does he suffer it? why does he look on and hold his tongue? And what those Objections are which Wicked and Atheistical persons make against his permission hereof, we undertook in the *Second* place to enquire.

II. And there is not among all the various dispensations of God to the Sons of men, any that bad men have taken occasion more violently to object against than this: For albeit the natural tendency of things, the unguarded condition of the Good; the unrestrained Propensions of the Bad, make it very probable that things would be thus, were they left to themselves. Yet how comes it to pass that God does not interpose, that he does not hinder the one, and defend the other? This has been a stumbling-block not only to ill men, but to some of God's choicest Servants, we find them often stagger'd at it, and not knowing what to conclude from it. Holy *Job* who is transmitted to us as in other respects, a very great Pattern of Patience, when he saw the prosperity of the Wicked, could not contain himself, but cries out in his 21. Chap. ver. 4. *As for me, is my complaint to man? and if it were, why should not my spirit be troubled? wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power, &c.* *Jeremy* likewise seems to beat a very great loss how to reconcile

How

B 2

this

this with God's Justice, in his 12. Chap. vers. 1. *Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee; yet let me talk with thee of thy Judgments, or let me expostulate, or reason the case with thee, Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?* But above all it was the forest Temptation to the Author of the 73. Psalm, he confesses that *his feet were almost gone, his treadings had well nigh slipt; and why? he was grieved at the wicked, he saw the ungodly in such prosperity.* This makes him cry out in the 13. ver. *Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.* Nay it had almost prevailed with him to make the same construction of it that those wicked ones did, whom he mentions in the 11th ver. who inferr'd from it that *God does not know, there is no knowledge in the most High.* And at this time, this is the great Argument which the Atheist uses to banish the belief of a God and his Providence out of the world; For thus he argues from the wicked's oppressing and afflicting the pious Servants of God, and prospering and thriving by it; *Either God does not see, has no knowledge of these things, or if he does see and has knowledge of them, he either would hinder them but cannot, or can hinder them but will not; If God would hinder them but cannot, then is he not omnipotent; if he can but will not, then is he not just and good; so that either his Power or his Justice and Goodness must be given up, or else those Attributes must be salved by the Imperfection of his knowledge, and so he pretends it a kinder as well*

well as more reasonable thing to say that God does not regard, is not at leisure to take Cognizance of affairs below, rather than that he wants either the power, or justice and goodness to hinder such irregularities: and thus the knot is cut instead of being untied, and the Atheist seems so tender of some of God's Attributes as to take those measures to secure them which would effectually prove him not to be God, which is what he desires to prove; for the true Notion of a God is a Being infinite in all perfections, and that Being that wants any is not God; and therefore he that is defective in knowledge can no more be God, than he that is not infinite in Power, Justice, or Goodness. Thus these disputers of the world, who through wisdom, as the Apostle speaks, know not God, by their foolish reasonings would dispute him out of Being.

III. But to vindicate the Divine Providence from these unreasonable cavils, and to expose the weakness of those objections which are made against this procedure (which was the third thing proposed), I have no more to do than to shew that it may be very consistent with the Justice and Goodness of God to permit these things; for the Objection is built upon the contrary supposition, and the Atheist would therefore prove that if there be a God, either he does not know or cannot hinder these things; because it is inconsistent with his Justice and Goodness to suffer them, if he knows and can prevent them. But now if God may be very just and good, notwithstanding he does suffer and can prevent them, then is his permission thereof no argument either of his want of Knowledge or Power.

I say then God does see, has knowledge of these things, nay he not only sees, but orders or suffers them; for nothing falls out but by his appointment, or permission; all the occurrences in the world are the results not of Chance, but of his wise Counsel, the effects of that Providence that extends it self to the most minute Creature, *not a Sparrow falls to the ground without him, even the hairs of our head are all numbred.* And he can prevent and hinder these things if he pleases, his power extends to every thing that is the object of any power, to every thing that does not imply a contradiction.

But though God does see and order, or permit, and can prevent these things if he pleases, yet is his permission of them not at all inconsistent with his infinite Justice and Goodness.

For the proof of which I will endeavour to make good these three things.

1. That it is not inconsistent with God's Justice and Goodness to suffer good men to be afflicted in this World.

2. That it is not inconsistent with God's Justice and Goodness to suffer bad men to be prosperous here.

3. That it is not inconsistent with God's Justice and Goodness to suffer bad men to be the instruments by which good men are afflicted.

I. It is not inconsistent with God's Justice and Goodness to suffer good men to be afflicted in this world, for these reasons.

1. Because afflictions in this world are not always punishments, but many times excellent means whereby God designs a great deal of good and benefit to those that are exercised with them; by which he weans them from the world, reduces them when they are going astray, tries, proves their Faith, Patience, Submission, Resignation to, and dependence upon himself; by which he advances and increases their Graces, raises and heightens their desires, and longings after that perfect state of unmixt happiness, where no afflictions can enter: and then when afflictions produce such blessed effects, when they yield such *peaceable fruits of righteousness*, certainly God is neither unjust nor unkind in suffering his best Servants to be exercised with them. But,

2. Supposing afflictions to be punishments, yet let the best man that ever labour'd under the severest of them, but look into himself, and he will find abundant cause to acquit the Justice and Goodness of God: for *there is none righteous that sins not; the just man falls seven times a day*, the very best of meer men have many failings, are guilty of many sins; which, if God should deal rigorously with them, would make them justly liable to eternal damnation. Is God then unjust in punishing those that offend, and deserve punishment; in punishing those with temporal calamities that deserve eternal? Nay, is he not very good and merciful in chastising them here for their sins, and not reserving them for the dreadful Account of the other world? So that considering the nature of afflictions, that they are not always punishments, and the demerits of the best

of

of men, that though they were punishments, yet they deserve much worse; it can be no impeachment of God's Justice and Goodness that he permits good men to be afflicted in this world; especially since,

3. He has appointed a day wherein he will abundantly recompence all the troubles and sorrows and sufferings of the pious men with joys unspeakable and full of glory, when all the pressures and injuries he laboured under here, shall add weight and lustre to that never-fading Crown which is reserved for him in the Heavens.

2. As it is not inconsistent with God's justice and goodness to suffer good men to be afflicted, so neither is it to suffer bad men to be prosperous here. For,

1. As afflictions are not always punishments, so prosperity is not always a blessing; to let a sinner commit his villanies with impunity, and to be a gainer by them is, it may be, one of the severest inflictions that God lays upon men in this world; there is not a more dreadful sentence that God passes upon any wretch in this life, than that or such like as he pronounced against Ephraim, *Ephraim is joyned to Idols, let him alone, let him take his course, enjoy his beloved Idols, go on merrily in his sins, he shall have no check, or hinderance from me.* The steps to God's hardning of Pharaoh, as the Scripture terms it, were the taking off his judgments from him and his Land; whilst they were upon him, he promises in obedience to the message which Moses brought him from the Lord, to let the people go; the fire of affliction, while he was in it, had softened and temper'd him into a compliance with the Divine Commands: but when he saw there was respite,

the Rod taken off, the Judgments removed, he would not let the people go ; when once out of the fire, presently he returned to his former hardness : If then the impunity and prosperity of the wicked be their hardning and Judgment, it is certainly not unjust with God to suffer it.

2. Supposing their prosperity to be a blessing to them, yet as there is no good man but has a great Alloy of evil mixt with his goodness, so there is hardly any man so bad but has something of good in him, at least some natural or moral good, some good quality, by which he is useful and serviceable to the World : Now for God to reward the natural or moral goodness of otherwise very bad men, with outward temporal blessings, seems very agreeable to that rule by which he governs himself in the distributions of recompences, (*viz.*) to reward every one according to his works ; and is so far from being a reasonable objection against his Justice or Goodness, that no doubt the Atheist would more violently, and I am sure, more plausibly object against both, if God should suffer that, whether natural or moral goodness, to be altogether unrewarded : Besides, bad men are many times instruments in the hands of God for the execution of his purposes, and bringing about of his designs, and their serving the ends of Providence (though undesignedly and unwittingly) God looks upon himself in some sort obliged to reward with outward recompences ; it was the case of *Nebuchadnezzar*, of whom (though for his own private ends he had made War against *Tyrus*, yet because he did thereby instrumentally serve to work God's purposes against *Tyrus* too) God says *he will give him the land of Egypt for his labour*

labour, wherewith he served against Tyrus, for he wrought for me, saith the Lord of Hosts.

But 3dly. Although wicked men should have none of this natural or moral goodness, nor any useful quality to mankind, nor be any ways serviceable to the ends of Providence, but were purely bad without the least Allay or mixture of goodness, yet certainly it cannot argue want either of Justice or Goodness in God to trye all means to reduce these wicked men and make them better. If God should punish villany as soon as it is committed, cut the sinner off in the actual commission of his iniquity, give him no space to repent, nor use any methods to bring him to it, the Atheist would think this much more cruel and unjust. But for God to try whether a sinner will be reformed or not, before he executes judgments upon him, to afford him time and opportunities for repentance, to shew some outward kindness, bestow some temporal good things upon him, to try if happily his mercy will lead him to make use of those opportunities, as it is a clear demonstration of the goodness of God, so is it no argument against his Justice; Because if these methods fail of their designed ends, and the sinner continues proof against them, and unreformed by them, there is in the

4. Place a day of retribution coming, *the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment* of God, when impiety and villany, however it has escaped and prosper'd here, shall be sure to meet with its due returns; when God's long abused Patience shall appeal to his Justice, and his Goodness that could not lead the sinner to repentance, shall aggravate his guilt and heighten his condemnation.

So that it is no impeachment of God's Goodness or Justice that he suffers very bad men to be prosperous here, because prosperity is not always a blessing to them, or if it were, yet possibly there may be something of good in them which God may think fit to reward with outward favours, or if they have no goodness in them, his blessings to them are but the attempts of his mercy to work some in them; and if they prove unsuccessful, his justice shall be sure to be glorified at the last in their Eternal destruction.

3. It is not inconsistent with God's Justice and Goodness to suffer bad men to be the instruments whereby good men are afflicted; This seems to be the great Objection in the Text, *Why holdest thou thy tongue while the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?* Although a good man may deserve afflictions, yet certainly he does not deserve so bad as that persecuting Tyrant, or that cruel Oppressor; Why then does that wretch succeed in his oppressing and injuring of him that is not so bad as himself?

But here I hope it will be no difficult matter to clear the Justice and Goodness of God.

For if as I have already proved, God may without the least impeachment of those Attributes lay afflictions upon the best of men, and they have no reason to complain of either for his afflicting them, I cannot see why he should be censured for the means he makes use of for the executing those afflictions; nor why he should be thought more hardly of for using men for that purpose, than for employing any brute instrument: If by my sins I have forfeited his protection, and my title

to my Goods, Estate, or Life, I am no more unjustly dealt with if he suffers a Thief or Plunderer to rob me or pillage my goods, than if he had suffered a Fire to consume them; if he suffers a powerful Oppressor, perjured Evidences, or a corrupt Judge, to take, swear, or give away my Estate, than if he had suffered a storm at Sea, or any accident at Land to ruine me; if he suffers a persecuting Tyrant, a profligate *Debauchee*, or suborn'd witness to murder me, than if he had suffered any ordinary disease to have been my death; for both the one and the other are but instruments in the hands of God for the execution of his Judgments; and if I have deserved those Judgments from him, by what means soever he executes them upon me, I cannot call him unjust.

Yet it seems hard that those who have much more deserved to suffer, should fare better than those who have less deserved it, and should prosper and triumph in their ruin.

But if (as I shewed before) this prosperity of the wicked is but their Hardning, their Judgment, whereas all the afflictions they are permitted to exercise good men with are but for the purging out of their corruptions, the tryals or improvements of their Graces, and advances of their Happiness, if this be only the wicked's receiving their good things here, of which they must expect no portion hereafter, and the righteous receiving their evil things in this world, that so they may escape the severer retributions of that which is to come, then the wicked oppressors do not in the issue fare so well as then the afflicted righteous.

Besides, who else can be the executioners of these
Judg-

Judgments but the wicked? Can good men oppress, steal, persecute, kill? or would they continue good if they should? None other are capable of being these instruments but bad men, who can be contented to thrive and gain by any methods, how base or wicked soever; and who take great delight in any instances whereby they may express the enmity that has so long been between the seed of the Serpent and the Seed of the Woman, and of wreaking that spleen and malice which they the children of the Devil will ever bear to those that are born of God.

In short, if there be any injustice or unkindness in God's making use of such instruments for the execution of his Judgments, it must be either with respect to the persons that suffer, or to the instruments themselves; It cannot be with respect to those that suffer, who having corruptions enough to need afflictions for Discipline, and sins enough to provoke God's Judgments, he is neither unjust, nor unkind in making use of the most capable and apt, whether brute or rational Instruments, for the laying those afflictions upon them, which they stand so much in need of, or so justly deserve: Nor with relation to those wicked instruments; for taking God's permission of their villanies and suffering them to prosper and thrive by them in the severest sense, yet, if God has tryed, and they have been proof against his former methods for their reformation, what injustice is there in his giving over to try them any further? Is God obliged to use violence to make men good, and to force them to be happy against their wills? 'Tis enough that he has placed Heaven and Hell before them, given them their option of Life and Death; that he has waited long

long to see which they will choose, that he has used various methods to incline them to make a wise choice, and to reclaim them from those wicked courses which they are engaged in, and which lead to eternal death ; if all this will not do, and they will neither be led to repentance by his goodness, nor driven by his judgements, who can call God unjust or unmerciful in suffering them at last to take their course, and to run into that destruction which they would not be persuaded to avoid?

And thus I hope I have sufficiently proved that it may be very consistent with God's Justice and Goodness to suffer good men to be afflicted, bad men to be prosperous in this world ; and likewise bad men to be the instruments by which good men are afflicted : And if God may be very just and good in permitting these things, then may he notwithstanding that his permission, be very knowing and powerful too ; for his not hindring a thing, which he is just and good in permitting, can be no argument of his want either of knowledge of that thing, or of power to prevent it.

Having now vindicated the Divine Providence from those Objections which the Atheist raises against it, and seen the unreasonableness of those Conclusions which he draws from bad mens succeeding in their oppressions, and thriving with the spoils of those that are better than themselves ; I proceed in the last place to shew what more reasonable as well as useful Inferences we ought to make from hence, and what practical Instructions this consideration will afford us for the government of our lives. And it will be of very great use to

us in these following particulars, which I hinted in the beginning.

1. Since God suffers bad men to prosper, and good men to be afflicted in this world, this gives us an irrefragable assurance of a future Judgment and State; because otherwise there will not be an opportunity to manifest that universal and impartial Justice which is essential to the Notion of a God, and which he constantly asserts he will govern himself by in his distributions of Rewards and Punishments to the Sons of men, whom he assures he will recompence according to their works: For however God may very righteously, for the manifestation of his goodness, and to convince men that not the least good in any shall fail of its reward, recompence that little goodness or serviceableness that is in bad men with some outward prosperity here, since there is a Hell prepared for them wherein they shall suffer the just punishment of the general impiety of their lives; and for the manifestation of his Justice, and hatred to sin punish the faults and failings of the best men with temporal afflictions, since a glorious reward of all their piety and goodness is reserved for them in the other world; yet, if there were no such rewards or punishments to be distributed hereafter, these dispensations here would hardly seem just. As sure therefore as there is a God that judgeth in the earth, and this Judge of all the world will do right, so sure from the miseries of the good and happiness of the wicked here, we may conclude that there will be a day wherein the Scene shall be changed, a Judgment that shall set all these things right and straight, shall assign to the wicked for their portion—

portion an eternity of tribulation and anguish and pain; but to the afflicted righteous, glory and honour and eternal life.

2. Since God permits very good men to be afflicted, and very bad men to flourish here, this should teach us that Lesson of St. John, *not to love this world, nor the things of the world*; for it must necessarily abate our love and value for the world, to consider that it is a place where the greatest innocency and vertue cannot secure a man from sufferings, but possibly expose him the more to them, where a good man cannot be safe, but lies open to the oppressions of tyranny and villany, where bad men prosper and *devour those that are more righteous than they*, undoubtedly to a good man this cannot seem a desirable place: And then for the things of the world, by which I mean the enjoyments of it, the Power, the Honours, the Riches, the Pleasures, from hence we may make a due estimate of them too; for certainly we must allow that God does best understand the value of things, but it is very plain from hence that in his esteem these things are not very valueable; for if they were, he would never suffer his favourites whom he loves to be without them, and his enemies whom he hates to enjoy them; which since he does, it is clear that in his judgment they are of no great worth; and therefore should be of no great account with us, because we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth.

3. Since God suffers good men to be afflicted and wicked men to enjoy prosperity in this world, this should excite and inflame our desires and longings after

the other world, not only because in general that will be a place where the Scene shall be shifted, where the wicked shall be made miserable; and the good man happy. A consideration which does mightily enhance the glorious rewards that attend good men in the other world, and therefore may justly raise our expectations of them; for from the afflictions which good men labour under here, they may well conclude, That God who sees, and knows them, and cannot forget their labours of love, will not let the sufferings they undergo for his sake, to lose their reward; and indeed they have his promise to rely upon, that he will not, for he assures them by his *holy Apostle*, that *their light afflictions that are but for a moment shall work for them, not only glory, but, a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* And as the sufferings of good men, so the prosperity of bad men here may justly heighten our apprehensions of those glories that are laid up for good men hereafter. For it is very natural to argue, If God be so gracious to bad men, so bountiful to those that are Bastards and not Sons, as to indulge them a liberal share of prosperity and the good things of this life; then infinitely great surely are those rewards, and inconceivably glorious is that inheritance which is reserved in Heaven for those good men that are his true Sons by Regeneration and Adoption.

4. What I have discoursed should teach us neither to think hardly of God, nor to envy wicked men when he permits them to persecute his Church, and to triumph in the miseries and ruin of his best Servants. The *Psalmist*, when he had recovered himself, owns himself to have been *Foolish, and Ignorant, and a Beast*, for grieving at the

flourishing Estate of the ungodly, and for entertaining hard and unworthy thoughts of God upon that account; he found upon his going into the Sanctuary that the prosperity of these men was but their being mounted higher upon slippery places, that they might the more surely and irrecoverably fall, and that their end was to be rooted out at the last: whereas whatever persecutions good men suffer, the end of the upright man would be Peace, and therefore he acknowledges that in all these seemingly unaccountable Dispensations, truly *God is loving unto Israel.*

I am sure we of this Church and Nation have found him to be so, and have reason to say with one of the famous *Seven Brethren* in the *Maccabees*, that though the living God has been angry with us for a while for our chastening and correction, yet at last he has been at one again with his servants. Though he has shak'd his Rod over us, threatned to remove our Candlestick, and to permit our Adversaries to lay waste out *Sion*; yet he has put a hook into their Nostrils, and sent his Angels to deliver us out of the hands of our enemies, and from the expectation of all the people that hate us. And though he has not yet so wonderfully appear'd for the rescue of some of our reformed Brethren; whether it be that they are not yet meet for such a Deliverance, or their enemies not ripe for Destruction; that these have not yet filled up the measures of their sins, nor the other lain long enough under the scourge for their correction and reformation, or for whatever other reason it pleases him still to suffer their persecuting enemies to tyrannize over them: yet let us have a care of charging God

foolishly for the heavy sufferings of our Brethren, or of envying the long success of their Persecutors, for God is just in all his dealings, and holy and good in all his ways; he does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men, but when he has great reason for it, and excellent ends to serve by it. And however the prosperity of their persecutors may look to unthinking men, yet to envy it is indeed to envy them their Judgment and Reprobation; and to suffer the utmost misery, the most exquisite torments that the wit or malice of a Missionary can invent, or the fury of Dragons execute, is ten thousand times rather to be chosen than to enjoy all the prosperity and success, all the pomp and power in the world, and at the same time to labour under the guilt of so many sacred Promises and Oaths broken, so many solemn Leagues and Treaties violated, and under the Tears and Cries of so many miserable Orphans and Widows, the unjust Invasions and Desolations of so many Countries and Cities, the Blood of so many thousands, the Rapes upon so many Souls as well as Bodies, as the Greatest Tyrant of this or any Age has to answer for. But

5. And Lastly, from hence we learn also that all these I have now mentioned, and, if possible, greater impieties and treacheries in our Adversaries, will give us no security against them, if we by our sins provoke God to give us over unto them. Possibly some of over sanguine Complexions and hopes may flatter themselves with great assurances of safety and success merely from the consideration of the wickedness of those Enemies we are necessarily engaged with, who it must be acknowledged

are such, that if ever the wickedness of enemies alone were a sufficient ground to raise a hope of success against them, we might reasonably conceive such hopes. But what I have been largely insisting on may be sufficient to arm us against so fatal a delusion: For God, I have observed, does and may make use of what Instruments he pleases, the vilest and worst of men for the execution of his Judgments: and therefore if we by our provocations have deserved so severe a one, as that our glory should be given up into our enemies hands, we cannot from their impiety promise our selves impunity.

We must not then take our measures from them, but turn our eyes inwards, and see how things stand at home; But, Blessed God! what a black and affrighting Scene shall we here behold? Should I insist upon the greater light and knowledg of our duty that has been afforded us, the stricter obligations to it, that our holy Religion lays upon us; the purer way of worship that we have been bless'd with, and all the various endearing methods that God has used to reform and *purifie us to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works*; and then inquire how we have answered these obligations, what effects these methods have had upon us? whether we have been as much purer than our neighbours in our lives, as much more reformed in our manners, as our Church and Religion are more pure and reformed than theirs, as much better in every respect than they; as we have had reason and opportunity to be? should I enumerate the particular scandalous vices that are publicly committed and gloried in, whether those of our own growth, or those we have catch'd over together with their fa-

shions from foreign Nations, and in both outdone our
 Patterns; should I reflect upon the unthinking life of ma-
 ny, who are as *without God in the world, for he is not in
 all their thoughts*; who divide their time between sleep
 and pleasure, and as they never call themselves to account,
 so they as little consider that God will: Or upon, the
 more daring provocations of others, who count it the
 greatest scandal and reproach to be thought Serious and
 Vertuous, and are afraid of nothing so much as the
 imputation of Sobriety and Religion; who shew their
 Wit, as they vainly think, in ridiculing every thing that is
 Sacred, and their Courage in defying God, their Consci-
 ences and the eternal flames that are prepared for them,
 whether they believe it or not. Should I undertake the
 melancholick and ungrateful imployment, of ripping
 up these, or laying open that general dissolution of Man-
 ners that is too visible among us to be dissembled, it would
 easily convince us that we have little reason to value
 our selves above our Neighbours, or to think our selves
more righteous than they: But were we so, and were
 they much worse than we are, as bad almost as the De-
 vil himself, and as odious in those *pure eyes that cannot
 look upon iniquity*: Yet as it is no new thing for a Pa-
 rent to correct his Child with that rod which he after-
 wards throws into the fire; so neither is it strange or
 unjust with God to make those the instruments and ex-
 ecutioners of his Wrath and Vengeance here, whom he
 designs for the everlasting Objects of them hereafter:
 and therefore whilst our own sins testify and fight
 against us, it is to no purpose to hope that the greater
 faults of our Enemies should be any defence to us.

If

If ever then we would raise to our selves any comfortable assurances or hopes of being saved from our Enemies abroad, we must first endeavour to be saved from our more dangerous ones at home; labouring with all our might, in our several stations and capacities, to help forward that great design of a general Reformation amongst our selves.

'Tis a glorious and God-like Work, and however those that engage in it must expect the greatest opposition from the Prince and Men of this world, yet for their encouragement they may assure themselves that greater is he that will be with them, than all that can be against them; and though they must *wrestle both against flesh and blood, the lusts and corrupt affections of men, and also against Principalities and Powers, against the Rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickednesses in high places,* against all the policy and forces of the Devil and his Instruments; yet this ought not to discourage them, for they shall have the Strength and Wisdom of Heaven on their sides, and that *God who has begun a good work by them,* will (I trust) in his due time bring it to perfection.

But till this be done by us, or seriously and in good earnest endeavoured, *while we hate to be reformed,* what have we do to take this portion of God's word into our mouths, or to apply ourselves to him in the language of our Prophet? to tell him that *he is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity?* while we continue evil, and our iniquities are multiplied in his sight, what is it but either to mock him or tempt him to destroy us from before his Face? and while we per-

sist in our wickedness, and will be unrighteous still, how or with what Face can we, what ever Enemies we should fall a prey to, or however barbarously we should be used by them, expostulate with God, *Why holdest thou thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?*

No, if ever we expect comfort in Contemplating, or success in Pleading before God, his holiness, justice and goodness, we must first become holy and just and good our selves, we must break off our sins by repentance, and devote our selves intirely to his service and obedience; and then those Attributes of his will be our security, under any dispensations of his Providence, That the issue shall be our good and advantage.

I will not presume to trespass further than only to subjoyn, That this is a very proper and necessary work for this time, both as it is that part of the Year which the Church has more particularly devoted to Abstinence and Mortification; and I am sure all our Fastings and Austerities that do not help us to deny our sins as well as our Meats and Pleasures, that do not tend to reform and make us more apt and ready for the work and service of God, are very vain and to no purpose; and also as it is the Season wherein we are going out to Battle against our Enemies; and if God go not forth with our Hosts, what success can we expect? and how can we imagine that he should come into an Alliance with us, till we have broke our League with Death and agreement with Hell, and discarded our sins, to which he is an irreconcilable Enemy?

Let us then turn away from all our wickedness that we have committed, and do that which is lawful and right, denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts and living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; let us rent our hearts and not our garments; and turn to the Lord with weeping and fasting and mourning; let the Priests, the Ministers of the Lord, sanctifie themselves, and weep between the Porch and the Altar, and say, Spare thy people, O Lord; and give not thy heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them; wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God? Let all Orders and Degrees of men among us repent and amend, and then cry mightily unto God, Look down, O Lord, from Heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory; Where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and thy mercy towards us? Are they restrained? O, our Redeemer, suffer not our Adversaries again to tread down thy Sanctuary, the people of thy holiness have possessed it yet but a little while: And then we may hope, that God will hear and have mercy; that thus sowing in Tears we shall reap in joy, and that such a penitential Spring will be followed with a happy and successful Summer.

F I N I S.

